

Penicillin Allergy and Pregnancy

Did you know that



of people in the US report having a penicillin allergy.



9 out of 10 people

who report allergies to penicillin are no longer allergic!



of people with a penicillin allergy outgrow the allergy over the course of 10 years!

Why should I get evaluated for penicillin allergy during pregnancy?

Penicillin and related antibiotics are commonly used during pregnancy and delivery. They are better studied in pregnancy and have fewer potential side effects than alternative antibiotics.

Penicillin allergy testing will tell you if you can take penicillin antibiotics without having an allergic reaction like hives or anaphylaxis.

About 1 in 4 pregnant people need penicillin antibiotics during labor to protect their baby from Group B Streptococcus (GBS) infection.

GBS testing is recommended for all pregnant patients at 36-37 weeks.

Related antibiotics called cephalosporins are used for C-sections, urinary tract infections, and other infections during delivery.

Healthcare providers often avoid these if you have a penicillin allergy.

Is penicillin testing safe for me and my baby?

Yes, penicillin testing is generally very safe. Please see back for the specific steps of penicillin testing.

Penicillin is not absorbed into your body or bloodstream during skin testing.

The amoxicillin (penicillin antibiotic) that you receive as part of testing is safe to take during pregnancy. Taking one full dose of amoxicillin is not associated with pregnancy-related complications in any pregnancies including high-risk pregnancies.

However, if you had a reaction to penicillin within the last 5 years or a severe rash, please let your OB or allergist know so we can discuss this before testing. If you have any questions, we can arrange a video visit before in-person testing.

References:

- "Penicillin Allergy in Pregnancy" by Kimberly Blumenthal and Erica Shenoy. JAMA Patient Page. March 24/31, 2020.
- "Prevention of Group B Streptococcal Early-Onset Disease in Newborns." Committee Opinion 797 from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). February 2020.

Penicillin Testing

How does penicillin testing at UCSF work?

Ask your OB/GYN for a referral to the Allergy clinic for penicillin testing any time during pregnancy or preconception. If you do not hear from the clinic within a week, please call 415-353-2725 to schedule an appointment.

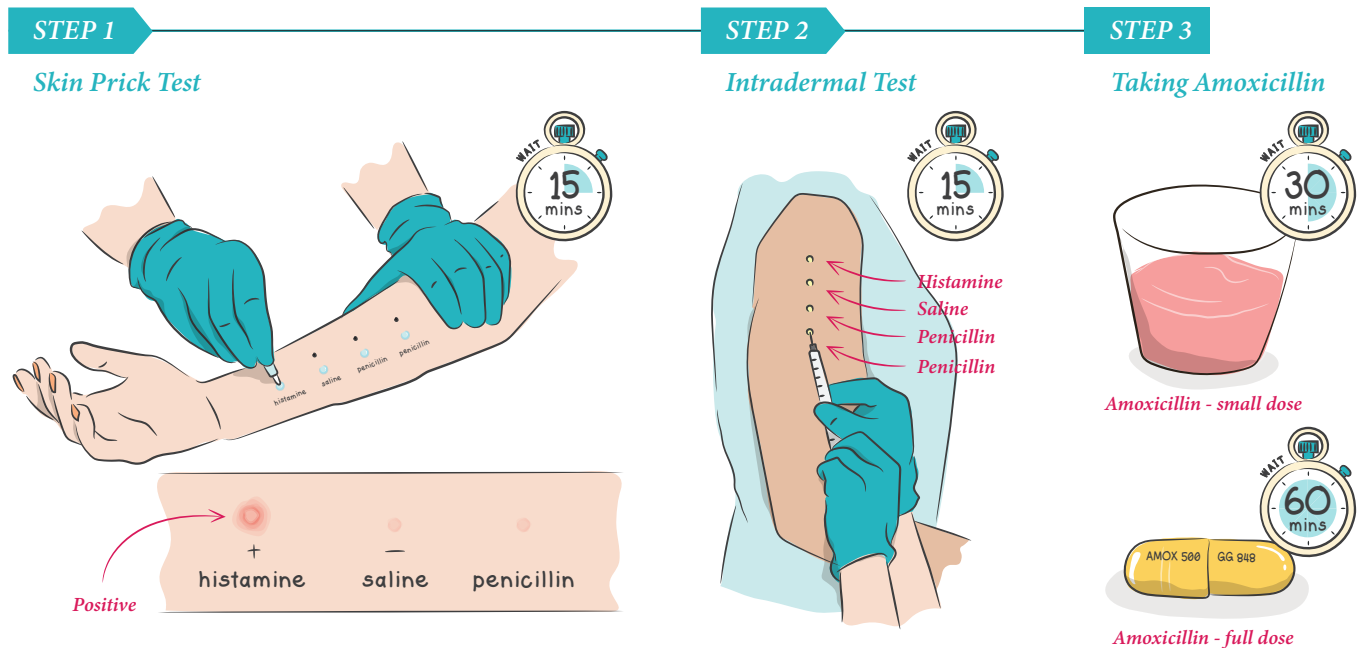
Antihistamines (including Unisom) interfere with testing results, so please avoid taking them for 5 days before your visit. You will receive a full list of medications to avoid. Penicillin testing visits take about 3-4 hours so you will want to bring something to do during the visit.

What happens during penicillin testing?

Step 1: Penicillin testing starts with penicillin skin testing. Penicillin is not absorbed into your body or bloodstream during skin testing. The skin is first pricked with a small plastic “fork.”

Step 2: If there is no reaction, a small needle is used to place penicillin underneath the skin.

Step 3: If Step 1 and Step 2 are negative, a small dose of a penicillin antibiotic (amoxicillin liquid or tablet) is given under observation in the allergy clinic. If there is no reaction, a full dose of amoxicillin tablet or capsule is given under observation in the allergy clinic.



The Allergy Clinic care team is trained to treat reactions (such as hives or rash) in the rare case one occurs. Mild symptoms occur after testing in 1-2% of people and severe reactions are very rare (less than 1%). Antihistamines and topical steroids used to treat rashes are safe to use during pregnancy.

However, if you had a severe rash in the past that required treatment with oral steroids or hospitalization, please talk with your OB or allergist first, as testing may not be recommended.